

THE SECCION FEMENINA IN SPANISH LITERATURE: 1930-1950

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Carmen Martín Gaité elaborates in several of her publications the urgency of studying the literary productions of a group of women who wrote during the 1930s and 1940s; periods of the Spanish Civil War and subsequent postwar¹. She mentions the immense impact of their writings in the culture of the period. She also regards these works as the most important instruments for the propagation of the falangist rhetoric which she defines in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* as a discourse of success and failure (42), a myth of the *mater dolorosa* (108) and an ethical and aesthetical catechism (hereafter *Usos*, 23)².

In this same volume she writes that the publications of this period, «have a clear connection to the ideology of the strong and positive woman propagated by the *Sección Femenina* of the Falange» (40)³.

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² Studies on the Spanish Falange can be found in *Prietas las Filas – La historia de Falange Española 1933-1983* by Sheelagh Ellwood, (Barcelona 1984); *El fascismo en los comienzos del régimen de Franco. Un estudio sobre FET-JONS* by Ricardo Chueca (Madrid 1983); *Fascism in Spain 1923-1977* by Stanley Payne (Madison, WI 1999).

³ Studies of the SF can be found on the works of María Teresa Gallego Méndez, *Mujer, Falange y Franquismo*. Madrid: Taurus, 1983; Inmaculada Blasco Herranz's study, *Crónica de la «Sección Femenina» y su tiempo 1934-1977*. Madrid: Asociación «Nueva Andadura», 1993 and Inbal Ofer, «Historical Models – Contemporary Identities: The

In *El cuarto de atrás* she regards this ideology as «enlightened catechism» (*catecismo ilustrado*) (83) and transmitted through a «literature of restraint. Models of conduct evident by the rejection to any kind of initiative. Fear of scandal» (*literatura de recato. Modelos de conducta marcados por el rechazo a tomar la iniciativa. Miedo al escándalo*) (132). Whereas Martín Gaité points out three avenues utilized in the dissemination of the «heroic woman» during the epoch of the Franco regime, literature, films and the radio, my work limits itself to the first one, the written word⁴.

Carmen Martín Gaité compares these publications with related issues published during the Republic and which she read as a child. She remembers one in particular: *Cartel*. The female protagonists in these stories participated in a variety of activities, either as students or as workers:

University women students, actors, painters or biologists portrayed [in these publications], fascinated me with their short hair styles and their lively glances when they spoke about their future plans. They did not hide them as if they were ashamed due to the dedication in choosing their profession nor declaring that they were ready to live their lives... I worshipped them in secret. They were the mythical heroines of my first youth (my translation, *Usos* 49).

(Y me fascinaban aquellas jóvenes universitarias, actrices, pintoras o biólogas que venían retratadas allí con sus melenitas cortas y su mirada vivaz y que cuando hablaban de proyectos para el futuro no ocultaban como una culpa el amor por la dedicación que habían elegido ni tenía empacho en declarar que estaban dispuestas a vivir su vida... Yo las veneraba en secreto. Fueron las heroínas míticas de mi primera infancia.)

According to Martín Gaité, the work of several women writers created between 1936 and 1950 deserves our attention because of its great popularity at the time and its strong influence on the culture of that period. A significant function of their works was to encourage women to adopt the behaviors that the Falange, the Spanish fascist party, and *franquista* forces felt were appropriate for women. One ought to remember that the Falange was established a few years be-

Sección Femenina of the Spanish Falange and its Redefinition of the term 'femininity'.» *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol 40 (4): 663-74.

⁴ In *Usos* Martín Gaité also mentions two North American films, *Recuerda* and *Rebeca*. All translations from the Spanish in this article are the author's own.

fore the initiation of the Spanish Civil War by José Antonio Primo de Rivera in 1933. His sister, Pilar Primo de Rivera, established its feminine branch, the *Sección Femenina*, (henceforth SF), in 1934. In my study I will analyze some of these writers mentioned above and some of their work. I have omitted Carmen de Icaza, of whom I have written elsewhere⁵.

The protagonist of *El cuarto de atrás*, the alter-ego of the author, remarks that «the functions performed by the *novelas rosa* were very important in the formation of women of the 1940's» (138). In other words, even though many critics consider these romance novels as being of lower rank, inferior in quality, Martín Gaité encourages us to focus upon the enormous impact these works exerted on the formation of a reading public, and, more specifically, on the lives of young women such as herself. In addition, she goes on to mention the predilection which this group of writers had for the values of the Falange, values apparent in the way women were represented, or constructed, in their fictional worlds. She mentions the names of these writers in several of her novels: in her short story, «La chica rara», she includes the names of Carmen de Icaza and of the two sisters, Luisa María Linares y Concha Linares Becerra; in *El cuarto de atrás* Carmen Werner, Eugenia Marlitt, Berta Ruck, Elisabeth Mulder de Daumer, María Mercedes Ortoll, María Luisa Valdefrancos, Elena Catena, María Fontan, Rosa María Aranda, Angeles Villarta, Concordia Merrell and, again, Carmen de Icaza and, finally, in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra*, Elisabeth Mulder (as a young woman the author of *El cuarto* had found the name of this writer to be very exotic). Finally she lists *El amor catedrático* by María Martínez Sierra (also attributed to her husband, Gregorio).

Martín Gaité mentions how some of these writers had participated actively in the administration of the feminine section of the fascist party and how they had incorporated the rhetoric of fascism in their texts. One ought to remember that the purpose of the SF was threefold during the civil war: the organization and operation of a self-sufficient propaganda system, the creation of divisions of nurses who operated alongside military doctors and independently of them and the operation of the Auxilio Azul. The latter was a clandestine association; its main purpose was to smuggle falangists and cler-

⁵ Alicia G. Andreu, «La obra de Carmen de Icaza en la difusión de un nuevo concepto de nación española.»

gymen from the republican territory into nationalist zone. Another function of the SF through out the forty three years of its time in power was to seize control of large sectors in which women operated and, as Ofer indicates, to monopolize female syndicates such as the Spanish Syndicate for (female) University Students (SEU) and the teachers' and nurses' Syndicates in addition to the *Servicio Social* for women (663).

In the significant study of Ofer regarding the workings of the SF, he mentions that the purpose of the rhetoric of the organization was not aimed at the entire female population but rather at two sectors specifically, the leadership and members of the SF and the women who were not members of the SF but whose instruction and professional proclivities brought them within the organization's area of influence (665). Its goal was to redefine the traditional definition of femininity, a description that would contain two experiences for women during the war, being a woman and being a falangist. With this objective in mind the leaders of the SF adopted two feminine historical models that would match their intent, Queen Isabel I and the Carmelite nun, Santa Teresa de Ávila. Both embodied the feminine and masculine traits along with religious project and intellectual power, the former through a nationalist-religious plan and the latter through a scholarly-religious one. These qualities would lead them to feminine activism. In addition to these two models, the womanly organization of the Falange invoked other feminine historical models such as Isabel Clara Eugenia, daughter of King Philip II and Marie Curie, the polish scientist who established the fundamentals for radioactive research. In addition, they utilized the popular image of the woman martyr dying on her feet, with her right hand extended out in the falangist salute and «Arriba España» on her lips (671). In this last image one encounters the combination of masculine traits in the partaking of the war efforts without compromising her femininity. Lastly the manipulation of the image of the female university student is prevalent, with her extraordinary drive for intellectual accomplishments and independent action (see Ofer and Scanlon).

The organization led by Pilar Primo de Rivera subsequently trained women of the Spanish middle classes to become leaders of the association so as to be able to inculcate the feminine population with its own ideology. In *Usos*, Martín Gaite writes:

The sermons about the female smile as panacea were infinite in the many publications of that period and they had a close connection to the ideology of woman as uncomplaining and joyful as propagated by the Feminine Section of the Falange (40).

(Las prédicas sobre la sonrisa femenina como panacea son incontables en las publicaciones de la época y tienen una clara vinculación con la ideología de la mujer fuerte y animosa propugnada por la Sección Femenina de Falange.)

Martín Gaité also alludes to the contradictions inherent in these texts due to the ambivalence in their discourse.

Intrigued by Martín Gaité's comments, I decided to take up her challenge. The study of fascist women writers satisfies two long-term preoccupations of mine. First is my desire to rediscover the works of little known Spanish women writers. My second concern has been a desire to understand the process by which the voice of the *Other*, the Outsider situated at the margins of a regime's hegemonic discourse in the period between the thirties and fifties, incorporates the language of the powerful in order for its own voice to be heard. When this process occurs, the self-representations of the *Other* normally embody a double-voiced discourse; one in which the dominant utterances are in dialogue with its own voice. Fascinated by this phenomena, I decided to explore whether the fascist rhetoric so obviously displayed in the writing of these women might represent, in part, a strategy to ensure the publication of their work by the government controlled publishing houses. Such a tactic might also allow them to formulate, in less obvious ways, a somewhat *different* construction of Otherness, a construction which would represent a kind of resistance to the dominant order, as the Italian critic, Lucia Re, writes in her study of Italian literature, «Fascist Theories of 'Woman'» (80).

Before I go on with my analysis, it is important to stress the palimpsest structure of their writing; a writerly voice that embodies a multiplicity of cultural discourses, all of them performing in a continuum. Each one of them joins the other, each one of them reflecting upon the past while looking forward towards the future. Within this oscillation, this to-and-fro movement, modernity recovers certain elements of past developments such as realism, romanticism and others. As a result, these works contain a diversity of articulations. However, this same phenomenon has been responsible for critics delegating them to one site or another. Labanyi, for example, writes that the Franco regime should be regarded as a period of conserva-

tive modernity, «breaking with the Republic by rejecting a certain kind of modernity rather than breaking with modernity as such» («Romancing» 5). She positions the works of the two sisters, Luisa María Linares and Concha Linares Becerra, under the rubric of conservative modernity. For Labanyi this conception of modernity is reflected on the jacket blurbs of their novels as well as in the text themselves. Within the novels the notion of speed is constant as well as that of «distinction,» represented by life in the modern city, by fashion and by the «ritmo moderno» which prevail (5). Also, the conservative modernity of these novels according to the critic, is perceived by their cinematic manifestation. As such, they project movement, variety and «amplitud de horizonte» (4).

Carmen Martín Gaité, on the other hand, refers to the movement from which these novels emanate as a «modernismo moderado» by which we understand it to mean a sober, restrained «modernismo.» Even though the characteristics of modernity are present in these novels, they are accompanied by more traditional signs. While the images that prevail signify constant movement and progress, pointed out by Labanyi, we realize that their function is to cover up old structures of meaning, the most clear being morality and obedience. In *Usos* the narrator indicates that the characters of Icaza and the sisters Linares-Becerra introduce the elements of cosmopolitanism and modernization (145). In «La chica rara,» its narrator explains that in the characterization of the female protagonists of the novels of these three novelists, the reader could find a «certain attempt towards modernity» (90) (*cierto conato de modernidad*): in their travelings, in their work and in the risks they took. They were able to do all of this «without altering or infringing in their own moral principles» (90) (*sin alterar o infringir en sus propios valores morales*). In regards to the heroines of the novels of Carmen de Icaza specifically, the narrator of *El cuarto de atrás* indicates that the elements of mystery and the exotic which surround Icaza's characters are neutralized by the conservative ideology of the writer, «impregnated through and through by the radical antifeminism of the *Sección Femenina*» (91). It is evident by the many comments of the narrators that the Martín Gaité dislikes the «moderado» part of postmodernity. The writers become in this frame, «implacable legislators of human conduct» (109) (*implacables legisladores de la conducta humana*) and their writing, «an enlightened cathecism», (catecismo ilustrado), the «wearisome and optimistic insistence of the decade of the forties» (85) (*el*

machaconeo ñoña y optimista de los años cuarenta) and a «stew of words and sounds handled uniformly by a group of collaborators» (132) (*compota de sones y palabras manejados al alimoni*) by the disciples of Pilar Primo de Rivera.

Diane Elam, in her book *Romancing the Postmodern*, argues that the romance genre has many features in common with postmodern fiction, in their shared rejection of realism, a rejection of causal logic and a preference for plots determined by probability, chance, and spacial and chronological displacement. Labanyi points out that the romances of the sisters Linares Becerra are not failed realist texts but are governed by laws quite other than those of causality. As examples she mentions the traveling of the protagonists between different countries and also the notion of dislocation. Elam also points out that postmodern culture is characterized by its frequent pastiche of popular forms, which in turn produces an intense self-reflexivity. In the works of the two sisters, according to Labanyi, there is also a self-conscious reworking of formulae (10). Also, the element of pastiche is present in these works. Pastiche, word that has two competing meanings, either a «hodge-podge» or an imitation. In the first usage, a work is called pastiche if it is created in imitation of several original works. In the second, the term denotes a literary technique employing a generally light-hearted tongue-in-cheek imitation of another's style. Montejo Gurruchaga, for example, argue that not all the novelists who write in the fifties ascribe to the tendencies established by the critics of the period. Some of them, she continues, approximate «the existentialist and social currents; through neorealism, social realism or critical realism» (154) (*las corrientes existencialista y social; mediante el neorrealismo, el realismo social o el realismo crítico*). Regarding the work of Dolores Medio, *Nosotros los Rivero* (1953), Gurruchaga states that the writer places her novels within the framework of social realism, by which she means the incorporation of nineteenth century distinctiveness plus *costumbrista* strokes (156). In regards to the works of another novelist of the same period, Concha Alós, the critic points out the incorporation of realistic techniques which can be perceived in her creation of «testimonial, realist narratives, with a critical attitude and an objective point of view» (157) (*relatos testimoniales, realistas, de actitud crítica y punto de vista objetivo*). The individual is displaced to the collective, and society becomes the protagonist of discourse (157). Lastly, Ignacio Ferreras signals that whereas the novels of the war and post civil war

were exceedingly realist it was not until the decade of the seventies that its dominance was diminished, allowing other discourses to participate in the literary creation. At this moment writers become inattentive to realism while they explore other avenues of improving their style and writing techniques (52).

I am of the opinion, as established before, that the novels written by this particular group of women are the result of its palimpsest structure: modernity, realism, romanticism and more. In other words, each of these movements here are at the halfway point of another, and so on. The realist text, for example, renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail, emphasis on verisimilitude, character is more important than action and plot; complex ethical choices are often the subject and events will usually be plausible. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements, diction is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone is matter-of-fact, objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important, the perseverance of the omniscient narrator. Modernity can be perceived in its concentration on movement, in the element of disorder, and in the disregard for linear narrative and analytical reasoning. It puts emphasis on diversity, language and the role of the reader as the receptor of their discourse. It can also be noticeable in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change. Romanticism is a general exaltation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect; a turning in upon the self and a heightened examination of human personality and its moods and mental potentialities; a preoccupation with the individual and the exceptional figure in general, and a focus on passions and inner struggles.

The construction of the protagonists in the *novelas rosa* was apparently centered on the reformulation of values for the women of the middle-classes related to the institutions of marriage and reproduction, as wives and mothers. When marriage was not an option for the protagonists either because they were not able to get married or because their husbands had died in the war, the heroines found themselves in a position to search for a job. There were two employment possibilities: as nurses or as teachers, even though the first one tended to prevail. In the remarkable narrative, *Cristina Guzmán, profesora de idiomas*, we never see Cristina perform as an educator. There are references to past experiences in the classroom, but it is clear by her comments in the novel that the protagonist considers teaching beneath her station. Instead of educating children she decides to become a nurse. She exe-

cutes these responsibilities with remarkable attention and nurturing towards the son of the wealthy American businessman and her future husband, Prynce Valmore. As has been written elsewhere, encouraging women to become nurses was closely tied to pragmatic national and moral considerations. They could attend to wounded soldiers returning from the front. Also, the scarcity of men due to the war and the large number of nationalist soldiers in urgent need of medical care motivated the spokespersons of the Falange to encourage women to provide urgent medical assistance. The profession of nursing, thus, became for them the appropriate medium to channel the energy of women in the *right* direction as well as to provide them with a minimum of financial security.

Once more, the novels fulfilled a very important function in this regard. Falangist writers reproduced in their work, over and over again, the construction of *heroic* women serving the nation and God as nurses and teachers. Interestingly enough, they proposed the notion that they did not need to be trained to perform these duties. Their innate gender inclinations of compassion, nurturing and sensitivity to pain and suffering were all that was needed to perform their duties. This notion came accompanied by the concept that contact with suffering, blood, violence and death brings out the best in women, making it possible for them to fulfill their real mission for the *Patria*.

Martín Gaité sees behind the construction of women in the *novelas rosa* of the twentieth century a combination of two prevalent rhetorics: falangismo/franquismo and the Church. Both institutions became allies in their insistence on strengthening marriage vows by exalting their superiority and advantages (*Usos* 52). Let us remember that in *Usos* she discusses the closeness of Franco and the Church, a relationship which she regards, ironically, as an «incipiente idilio» (20). She also remarks that «they [Franco and the Pope] were always linked together, supported each other in the notion of the reconquest of the spirit against the material» and that «in their portraits they appeared frequently next to each other in lecture halls, vestries and working places, in the ABC and in the living rooms of many houses» (21).

Both believed that their rhetoric would become more credible were they able to be transmitted with the aid of the SF of the Falange. On the other hand, Franco's political interest in the pursuit of the image of the married woman responded, among other factors, to

his desire to replenish the population that had been decimated during the Civil War. At the same time, the Church also encouraged the propagation of similar rhetoric because it balanced the agenda of Pope Eugenio Pacelli, considered by Martín Gaité as the first ideological support of Franco's regime (*Usos* 17) ⁶.

He originated the notion that Spain, salvation of the world, was the chosen one, exceptional and different:

The nation selected by God as his main instrument for the evangelization of the new world and unpersuadable bulwark of the catholic faith who has just demonstrated to the precursors of materialist atheism of our century, the highest proof that, above everything, are the values of Religion and the spirit (18).
(*La nación elegida por Dios como principal instrumento de evangelización del nuevo mundo y baluarte inexpugnable de la fe católica acaba de dar a los precursores del ateísmo materialista de nuestro siglo la prueba más excelsa de que, por encima de todo, están los valores de la Religión y del espíritu*) ⁷

This rhetoric represented in the novels espoused the imminent arrival of the New Nation, of the *real* Spain, based on the *recovery* of Catholic dogma in conjunction with the Fascist assertions about gender, *virility* or *male supremacy* for men, *motherhood* and *obedience* for women. In Spain and elsewhere, the representations of women in medicine, history, theology, economics and literature equated the feminine with motherhood, to the point that motherhood became glorified as the ideal female condition. As Durham contends in his study, *Women and Fascism*, it would be hard now to envisage an account of fascism, or any form of ideology of the extreme right, that does not take the importance of gender into account. The policies developed by the Franco regime and by the church with regard to gender show striking similarities. Catholic thinking on sexuality and the family —promoting the sanctity of marriage and defining women primarily in a familial role— constituted a familiar discourse that reinforced fascist policies relating to the subordination of women in virtually all aspects of public life. Gallucci explores the intimate re-

⁶ Eugenio Pacelli (1876-1958), native of Rome, was ordained priest in 1896. He became Pope Pius the XIIth in 1949. It is said that he saved 860,000 Jews from the death camps. He originated the notion that Spain, salvation of the world, was the chosen one, exceptional and different.

⁷ Pio the XIIth, April 16th, 1939. Cited by Martín Gaité (*Usos* 18) who obtained the quote from the study of Santiago Petschen: *La Iglesia en la España de Franco*, Madrid: Sedmay, 1977, p. 13.

lationship between the church and Musollini in Italy; the same could be said for the Spanish Catholic church and Franco. The encyclical *On Christian marriage*, issued by Pope Pius the XIth in December 31, 1930, exhibits ideological similarities between the Roman Catholic Church and Fascism. This document reiterated the traditional teachings of the church, «defining woman as wife and mother, arguing against the emancipation of women» (204). Scanlon mentions the different laws established by the Franco regime regarding the position of women almost from the beginning of the war. The purpose of these laws was to erase the advances, which the Republic had formulated, and to establish its own program⁸. For example, a law was instituted in March of 1938 which stated that the State will prevent women from working during the evening, will regulate work that women perform in somebody else's home and will free married women from working in the shops and factories. The *Ley de Bases* of July 18, 1938, established family subsidies: a subsidy of thirty pesetas per month to be paid when a woman had two children. The amount increased by fifteen pesetas per additional children up to twelve children. After the twelfth child, the amount would increment by fifty pesetas. These children had to be constituted within the framework of the family. Children born out of wedlock did not count. Procreation was incited also through the granting of awards and special transportation fares for large families.

The authors of the SF adopted the rhetoric of nationalism and the fascist constructions of gender and disseminated them through their many publications. The main representation of *virility* was visible in the multiple representations of cheerful soldiers in the battlefield defending, and in many cases dying, for their love of *Patria*, God, the Falange and Franco. The narrator of the novel of María Sepúlveda, *En la gloria de aquel amanecer*, states:

These boys [soldiers] go without a trace of doubt to where they have to go, full of trust and joy, offering generously at the al-

⁸ Scanlon mentions that the defeat of the Republic in 1939 destroyed all hopes for the independence of women. She writes that, 'in spite of the political differences among the parties supporting the Republic they all included in their programs the principle of equality under the law. Even though prejudices against women had not totally disappeared, women had been able to achieve a degree of economic, legal and sexual independence not realized until now' (320). She also mentions laws instituted by the Franco regime to suppress the advancement of women and to encourage procreation in her section, 'El ideal tradicional' (320-30).

tar of the nation the treasure of their young lives and of their limitless courage (108).

(Estos muchachos [los soldados] van sin vacilar un segundo adonde tienen que ir, llenos de alegría y de confianza, ofreciendo generosamente en el altar de la Patria el tesoro de sus vidas jóvenes y de su valor sin límites.)

Womanhood became mostly embodied in the multiple portrayals of happy mothers, engaged in the birth of male offspring whom they cheerfully offer to sacrifice for the military cause. When the child was a girl, the mother would train the daughter to become a mother like herself, gladly obedient to the fascist cause. In *Amor a bordo*, by Luisa María Linares Becerra, the protagonist hears from Carlos Arranz, the man she loves, «I will never be a toy in the hands of a woman. Whenever I get married, if I decide to do so, I will do it with a little woman who limits herself to be my wife rather than with a woman whose goal is to cultivate her own personality» (139) (*Yo nunca seré un juguete en manos de una mujer. Cuando me case, si algún día me decido a ello, lo haré con una mujercita que se limite a ser mi esposa, en lugar de cultivar su propia personalidad*).

The reader also finds more than a few cases of happy maidens who serve as nurses to the heroic troops wounded in war. In the short story of Concha Espina, «Princesas del Martirio,» three nurses sacrifice their lives with a smile on their lips: «in obedience to their own conscience within the religious and virile style of the blue Falange» (886) (*obedecen a su propia conciencia dentro del estilo religioso y viril de la Falange azul*). In a few cases, the satisfactory fulfillment of their function as nurses brings forth due recompense through the fulfillment of marriage. Even though women were not allowed to participate in the war, the authors were intent on letting their readers know that having a son or brother fighting in the war on the side of Franco was an evident proof that a woman was successful in life. María Rosa Iriarte, the protagonist of «Ojos azules,» a short story by Luisa María Linares Becerra, describes with pride the honor that her brother, Juan, bestowed on the entire family by fighting against the forces of the Republicans. In a dialogue with captain Enrique Vilar, María Rosa describes the pride of the family to have a brother fighting for the Nationalists: «[Juan's] heroic behavior is a source of immense satisfaction for us: in knowing that somebody with our last name is fighting for Spain» (69) (*Con su comportamiento heroico nos proporciona una inmensa satisfacción: la de saber que hay uno de nuestro apellido luchando por España*).

There is no question that several of these women authors were successful writers and capable of pursuing and achieving their own economic independence as evidenced by their many publications and the multiple editions of some of their novels. Some of them received recognition in the form of awards and prices. An appropriate example is the case of Carmen de Icaza, the baroness of Claret: the *ídolo de la postguerra*, according to Martín Gaité. Her most popular novel, *Cristina Guzmán, profesora de idiomas*, was first published in the magazine *Blanco y Negro* in Madrid, in August of 1936. Her editor until 1947, Afrodisio Aguado, published a second edition that same year in Barcelona; a third one in Valladolid, and a fourth one in Madrid. Additional editions were made by Gráfica Clemares and by Librería de Ferrocarriles established in Madrid. Her daughter, Paloma Pantoja, annotated and prologued the latest edition published in 1991 by Editorial Castalia. Loyola University also edited it, with annotations, for educational purposes in 1958 in the United States. The translation of the novels into eight different languages also attests to its popularity. In addition, it served as the basis for a screenplay which was made into a movie with the same title as the novel. According to the testimony of the author's daughter, many families adopted the name of Cristina due to the identification the readers had felt with the protagonist of the novel.

As might be expected, contemporary critics have ignored, rejected, or harshly criticized all of the works published by this group of women. Linda Gould Levine in, 'The Censored Sex: Woman as Author and Character in Franco's Spain' dismisses them while she approves of three other writers who supported the Republican cause: Margarita Nelken, Victoria Kent, and Federica Montseny (291). Sanz Villanueva refers to the 'profound degradation of the artistic element of the literature of this period' and to Carmen de Icaza as a 'subliterary writer' (55) (*escritora subliteraria*). Mainer mentions that their works published in the magazine of the SF, *Y*, «provided the necessary injection of minor sentimentalism, of a manageable mythology, in some sterile homes; they symbolized the encounter with a peaceful and thoughtful world, kind and puritan» (44). Even as late as 1998, Catherine Davis dismisses the presence of these writers. She does make a passing remark, however, to the «triumphing rhetoric of the victorious Right» (186).

The dismissive attitude of these critics is clear, but we must ask ourselves whether there is any other way to understand the work of

these women. As I have suggested, in order to be published, their work had to reinforce fascist ideology. One of the main duties and responsibilities of the Falange during and after the Civil War involved the control and dissemination of the written word: authority over all publications, the advancement of propaganda, and the establishment of censorship. Although the *Ley de Prensa*, which limited freedom of expression, was not officially established until 1938, a year before the end of the Civil War, Franco's obsession with controlling freedom of expression started at the beginning of the war. In July of 1936, he placed his brother-in-law, Ramón Serrano Suñer, in control of the press. In January of 1938 he handed over this authority to the Falange. Sinova, in *La censura de prensa*, mentions how under fascism, the *Ley de Prensa* became the tool used by the regime for the *expropriation* of all means of expression contrary to its own (277).

When publication became the sole responsibility of the Falange, the women of the *SF* took it upon themselves to find ways of promulgating fascist ideology. On one hand, they did this by establishing educational centers, university residences, summer camps, athletic centers, traveling classrooms (*cátedras ambulantes*), libraries and cultural cycles. They also helped to control the publication and distribution of books and magazines. And some of them wrote fiction. Somewhat paradoxically, this last group of women, who had had no opportunity to write prior to Franco coming to power, and whose voices, therefore, were unheard, now were provided with an opportunity to have their work published and distributed. As long as they adopted the voice of the ruling party and reinforced the view of women as mothers and as obedient servants of the fascist state *they could write*. A word of caution should be stated here, however. The presence of this contradiction does not mean that some of the writers hid their true feelings regarding fascist values and that they wrote something they did not feel. This would be difficult to ascertain unless one were able to have more information regarding their lives and work.

While it is true that all of their work reflects a fascist worldview, a careful reading reveals certain surprising elements one would not expect in a fascist rhetoric whose sole purpose is the dissemination of a hegemonic world view⁹. The most salient contradiction is the

⁹ Lorée Enders states that, «at the heart of the contested identity of the *Seccion Femenina* remains the question of agency. While the women of the *Seccion Femenina* perceive themselves as having manifested historical agency, their antagonists deny them that agency» (389).

portrayal of women as «successful intellectuals.» In these cases, special emphasis is placed on the capacity of the female characters as readers and writers able to use their minds and imaginations to appreciate the value of literature written by others, while at the same time able to create literature that is uniquely their own.

In *Niebla desde la frontera* by Concha Linares Becerra, Nora is a draughts-woman and fashion designer. Verónica, the protagonist of *Preludio a la muerte* by Elisabeth Mulder de Dauner is writing in her diary at the beginning of the novel. Her mother proudly announces that, 'Verónica is the most literary person I know. All about her is literary... a chosen passage, a page in an anthology' (67)¹⁰ (*Verónica es el ser más literato que conozco. Toda ella es literatura, pero literatura de buena calidad: un trozo escogido, una página de antología*). *La princesita de los Brezos* by Eugenie Marlitt begins with the protagonist, Leonor de Sassen, reading from the memoirs she started writing two years after her wedding, a work which required seven years to complete¹¹. Many of these protagonists are avid letter writers, diarists, short story writers, essayists; some of them are also active as journalists, as in the novel by Diaz Garrido, *Historia de una familia*. It is true that the main character attests to the joys involved in motherhood and challenges her female readers to follow in her footsteps, but, at the same time, through her journalism and her passion for writing she embodies an identity beyond simply motherhood:

Last summer, when my nine children came down with measles and whooping-cough, and I could not sleep, I would write. I sent my articles to our local newspaper; and then to a writing contest. Angels must have been protecting me because I got my third National Prize for Journalism. And since then, they have asked me to write short stories (15).

(*Este verano tuve una racha de sarampión-tosferina multiplicada por nueve, y como no podía dormir, escribía. Mandé mis artículos al periódico de aquí; luego a un concurso. Los ángeles me echaron un cable y me dieron un tercer Premio Nacional de Periodismo. Y desde entonces me han pedido que escriba cuentos.*)

Later, when she receives in the mail a copy of her first book, she cries out:

¹⁰ Some of Mulder's critics praise her sense of irony while others have seen her work as being in the middle of the kind of sentimentality that Carmen de Icaza displays in her works and in the reflective writings of Rosa Chacel.

¹¹ This novel originally was written in German. Ed. Juventud published the first edition in Spanish in Barcelona, in 1927.

My book! Our book! I collapsed on the armchair, stroking it tightly against my chest ... I remained still contemplating it ... my book was finally here. White and shiny. Beautiful (136).
 (¡Mi libro!... ¡Nuestro libro! Me desplomé sobre una butaca, acariciándole apretadamente contra mi pecho... Me quedé como tonta contemplándole... ahora estaba el libro aquí. Blanco y brillante. Precioso.)

It is my opinion that through the representations of protagonists engaged in creative activities beyond their identities as mothers, these authors present, albeit ambiguously, an alternative to the oversimplified view of women promulgated by fascist ideology. As aesthetic artists, these heroines function to demystify the Fascist cultural constructions of motherhood by suggesting an alternative construction of gender based upon an intellectual rather than a biological function. These writers produce ambiguous representations of women as both happy mothers participating in the fascist recreation of a *New Spain*, and as independent artists involved in self-fulfilling acts of individual creativity. This ambivalence is the result of a language, which contains at its core two levels of signification. On the first most obvious level is a discourse defined by a borrowing, *plagio*, of the prevailing constructions contained in fascist rhetoric; an appropriation of the fascist obsession with nationalism and gender. On the second level, however, there appears to be an implicit critique of the linguistic packaging of women favored by the fascist state, balanced by a more complex and ambivalent construction of the possibilities of female identity. When we add to this ambiguous depiction of the feminine figure the creative lives of the authors themselves and the possibility of financial independence they attained through their writing, we arrive at an image of women that goes beyond the simplistic notion of women favored by fascist ideology.

In conclusion, I believe that even as the novelists mentioned by Carmen Martín Gaité were promoting a construction of woman based upon images of motherhood, there also are forces within their novels that work to subvert this construction. And as I continue to study these works, I hope to learn more about these women and the difficulties they may have faced in speaking with a voice that was required by the State, while, at the same time, trying to tell a story that was uniquely their own.

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